

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Autism Edu-ECHO - supporting educators, students and families

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Introduction: In partnership between Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service (CHQ) and the Queensland Department of Education's Autism Hub (DoE), a Project ECHO-enabled community of practice has been developed to support education professionals working with students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) across Queensland and is an Australasian first. The community of practice is known as Autism Edu-ECHO and will be delivered from a hub site in Brisbane.

Short description of practice change implemented: Project ECHO is a guided practice model that exponentially increases access to best-practice care and reduces health disparities, through hub-and-spoke knowledge sharing networks. Online, interactive case discussions provide a platform for collaborative learning by primary care clinicians, educators, and social care providers, to empower providers to practice at the top of their scope.

Aim and theory of change: By creating a knowledge network to support educators across Queensland, students diagnosed with ASD can have their learning and developmental needs better supported by fostering integrated partnership between health and education experts.

Targeted population and stakeholders:

- Students diagnosed with ASD
- Families
- Educators

Timeline: The pilot will run for twelve months, with the view for extension.

Highlights:

- Australasian first;
- Rapid roll-out across Queensland state schools;
- Customised curricula to meet the objectives of education professionals;
- Engaged, sustainable partnership between CHQ and DoE's Autism Hub.

Comments on sustainability and transferability: Project ECHO is a highly sustainable way to disseminate knowledge and support enhanced practice for improved health and educational

outcomes for this target population. In comparison to traditional models of learning, ECHO presents a cost-effective and immediately scalable alternative that eliminates geography as a rate-limiting factor to address the needs of this vulnerable population, and the professional workforce seeking to support them.

CHQ has scaled the ECHO model since 2016 to address seven vulnerable populations or health priorities. The Autism Edu-ECHO demonstrates transferability of the model and how strategic inter-agency partnerships can co-fund scalable, sustainable solutions to address unmet needs.

Conclusions: Autism Edu-ECHO seeks to demonstrate positive improvement across:

- Increased school attendance rates;
- Reduced exclusion rates (suspension, expulsion);
- Increased staff job satisfaction, knowledge and confidence;
- Increased parent/carer satisfaction;
- Increased student satisfaction; and
- Increased education outcomes for students.

Discussions: Autism Edu-ECHO's benefits to children, young people and education professionals cover a myriad of metrics linked to education outcomes. By facilitating a community of practice made up of health and education professionals it is anticipated that more collaborative, practical and customised interventions can be designed and implemented to support approximately 20,000 students with ASD statewide. Improving students' health and education outcomes is expected to reduce challenges faced in adulthood, including isolation, education drop-out, unemployment and poor health and wellbeing.

Lessons learned: This co-designed pilot shifted culture and practice through a partnership model between government agencies. Successes relied on collaborative cross-agency leadership, joint funding and evaluation to capture the pilot's maturity over time.